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Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Question of Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. On 10 December 1997, the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution 52/75 on the question of Western Sahara. The Secretary-General, in close cooperation with the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has continued to exercise his good offices with the parties concerned. The present report, which covers the period from 30 September 1997 to 1 October 1998, is submitted in pursuance of paragraph 9 of that resolution.

Security Council resolution 1133 (1997)

2. On 20 October 1997, the Security Council adopted resolution 1133 (1997), by which it decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 20 April 1998 in order for MINURSO to proceed with its identification tasks and to increase its size in accordance with the Secretary-General's recommendations. The Council requested the Secretary-General to begin the identification of eligible voters in accordance with the settlement plan and the agreements reached between the parties with the aim of finishing it by 31 May 1998; to submit to the Council, no later than 15 November 1997, a comprehensive report, including a detailed plan, a timetable and financial implications, for the holding of the referendum; and finally to report to the Council every 60 days on the progress made in the implementation of the settlement plan and the agreements reached between the parties, and to keep the Council regularly informed of all significant developments.

Secretary-General's report of 13 November 1997

3. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1133 (1997) and as intended in his report of 24 September (S/1997/742), the Secretary-General, on 13 November 1997, submitted to the Council a comprehensive report (S/1997/882), including a detailed plan, a timetable and financial implications, for the holding of the referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara in accordance with the settlement plan (see S/21360 and S/22464 and Corr.1) and the agreements reached between the parties for its implementation. According to that timetable, the identification of applicants to the referendum was expected to be completed by 31 May 1998, the transitional period was to start on 7 June 1998 (D-Day) and the referendum was to be held on 7 December 1998.

4. The Secretary-General's report of 13 November, as well as his letter of 13 December to the President of the Security Council (S/1997/974), also provided an account of developments in the implementation of various provisions of the settlement plan, including the preparatory work

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undertaken by MINURSO to ensure the resumption of the identification operation by 1 December 1997. Extensive discussions were held by the Acting Special Representative with the parties, both of whom reiterated their commitment to resuming identification expeditiously and to proceeding in accordance with the practical measures agreed to during the fourth round of direct talks. During those discussions, the parties were informed of MINURSO's plan to open 12 centres, 9 of which would operate concurrently. The list of sheikhs eligible to testify was updated, and arrangements were made for selecting and agreeing in advance to a list of alternates. With respect to the convocation lists, both parties were granted a week to check the applicants' current addresses and a maximum of three weeks to ensure that people were notified, wherever they might be. Identification files stored in the United Nations Office at Geneva were returned to Laayoune in late October 1997, requirements for the initial reopening of four identification centres were assessed, and arrangements were made with the parties to have the centres restored to full working order. Following those preparatory activities, MINURSO resumed the identification operation on 3 December 1997, as planned. By his letter of 13 December 1997 (S/1997/974), the Secretary-General informed the Security Council that on 24 November 1997, the newly appointed Civilian Police Commissioner, Chief Superintendent Peter Miller (Canada) had arrived in Laayoune and assumed his duties.

5. On 26 December 1997 (see S/1997/1023), the Secretary-General informed the Security Council of his intention to appoint Mr. Charles F. Dunbar (United States of America) as his Special Representative for Western Sahara, to which the Council agreed in a letter from its President addressed to the Secretary-General on 30 December 1997 (S/1997/1024).

Secretary-General's report of 15 January 1998

6. In his report of 15 January 1998 (S/1998/35), the Secretary-General indicated that during identification sessions at Laayoune for convoked members of tribal groupings H41, H61 and J51/52, and at camps Smara and Dakhla in the Tindouf area for members of tribal groups J51/52, 3,927 non-convoked individuals from those groupings had presented themselves at Laayoune and 495 in the Tindouf area; and in succeeding days 8,613 individuals, mostly from grouping H61, had also come forward at Laayoune. The Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) protested that Morocco was in breach of the Houston agreements with respect to the sponsorship of non-convoked individuals. In consultation with his Personal Envoy, Mr. James A. Baker III, former Secretary of State of the United States of America, and in conformity with the Houston agreements, the Secretary-General decided to instruct MINURSO to proceed as soon as possible with the identification of those unconvoked individuals who had presented themselves on the days of convocation of their respective tribal groups. He also decided that, for applicants from "non-contested" tribes resident in northern Morocco, identification sessions initially scheduled to take place at Tan Tan and Goulemine in southern Morocco should be held at two northern locations where the number of resident applicants exceeded 10,000, that is, at El Kelaa des Sraghna and Sidi Kacem.

Security Council resolution 1148 (1998)

7. In its resolution 1148 (1998) of 26 January 1998, the Security Council welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara; approved the deployment of the engineering unit required for demining and of the additional administrative staff required, as proposed in the Secretary-General's report of 13 November 1997 (see S/1997/882, annex II); expressed its intention to consider positively the request for the remaining additional military and civilian police assets for MINURSO, as proposed in the same report (see S/1997/882, annex II), as soon as the Secretary-General reported that the identification had reached a stage which made the deployment of those assets essential; and finally called upon both parties to cooperate further with the Identification Commission so that the identification process could be completed in a timely fashion in accordance with the settlement plan and the agreements reached between the parties for its implementation.

8. In a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 19 February 1998 (S/1998/142), the Secretary-General informed the Council that his newly-appointed Special Representative had arrived in the mission area on 9 February 1998. The Special Representative had been received at Rabat by His Majesty the King of Morocco and senior officials of the Government of Morocco, and in the Tindouf area by the Secretary-General and other leaders of the Frente POLISARIO. He had also met with the Algerian authorities at Algiers, and intended to proceed to Nouakchott to meet with the Mauritanian authorities.

9. Subsequently, interruptions in the identification process, due to the illness of sheikhs, sandstorms, disputes between the parties and a change in procedures at the Laayoune airport for arriving and departing POLISARIO delegations, which was followed by a reciprocal change at the Tindouf airport for Moroccan delegations, led to a

perceptible increase in tension between the two parties. Some reservations were expressed by the parties regarding the Secretary-General's decisions contained in his report of 15 January 1998 (S/1998/35), concerning the centres in Morocco and the identification of tribal groups H41, H61 and J51/52.

Secretary-General's report of 13 April 1998

10. In his report of 13 April 1998 (S/1998/316), the Secretary-General indicated that although the total number of persons identified had reached 101,772, it was unlikely that the target date of 31 May 1998 for completing the identification process could be met. The delay had been due to the slowdown in identification activities in February and March 1998, and to the lack of progress in resolving the issue of the identification of applicants from the above three tribal groups. In addition, the climate of mutual distrust had not facilitated the task of MINURSO. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned delays, the Secretary-General considered it important that demining activities should start as soon as possible, as decided by the Security Council in its resolution 1148 (1998). In the Secretary-General's view, the months of May and June 1998 would be crucial for determining whether the identification of all applicants remaining to be convoked could be completed by the end of July 1998, and whether a solution could be found to the problem of those three groups. If, by the end of June 1998, sufficient progress had been made in the identification process and in the search for solutions to the contentious issue of those groups, he would submit in his next report to the Security Council recommendations for a revised timetable for the full implementation of the settlement plan, including preparatory measures for the establishment of the Referendum Commission. If, on the contrary, no solution had been found to the problem of the three "contested" groups, and if a large number of applicants from "non-contested" tribes also remained to be identified, the Secretary-General would recommend that the Security Council reconsider the viability of the mandate of MINURSO.

Security Council resolution 1163 (1998)

11. In its resolution 1163 (1998) of 17 April 1998, the Security Council decided to extend MINURSO's mandate until 20 July 1998 in order for MINURSO to proceed with its identification tasks with the aim of completing the process. It took note of the continuing deployment of the engineering units required for demining activities and of the administrative staff needed to support the deployment of military personnel, and expressed again its intention to consider positively the request for the remaining additional military and police assets for MINURSO as soon as the Secretary-General reported that the identification process had reached a stage which made such deployment essential. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council every 30 days from the date of extension of MINURSO's mandate on the progress made, and to keep the Council regularly informed of all significant developments in the interim period.

12. Pursuant to the above-mentioned resolution, on 18 May 1998, the Secretary-General submitted an interim report (S/1998/404) to the Security Council, wherein he informed the Council that during the month of April 1998 the pace of the identification process had been much slower than expected, with only two and a half weeks of work accomplished. However, following discussions with the parties, they had agreed to the identification programme for the month of May 1998, which provided for a substantially higher rate of identification, with at times as many as 10 teams operating concurrently in the Territory, the Tindouf area, Morocco and Mauritania. The Moroccan Government undertook to provide additional support to the identification operation in the form of air transportation for its observers and sheikhs between Laayoune and locations in Morocco. However, Morocco refused to participate in the identification of 603 individuals belonging to tribal groups H41, H61 and J51/52, listed in the 1974 census and living in the Tindouf area and Mauritania, whom the Frente POLISARIO had asked MINURSO to include in the May 1998 identification programme on the grounds that according to the Houston agreements, those individuals were entitled to be convoked for identification.

13. Although as of 11 May 1998 a total of 111,244 persons had been identified, with fewer than 50,000 applicants from "non-contested" tribes remaining to be convoked, whose identification the Identification Commission expected to complete by the end of August 1998 with both parties' full cooperation, ways of dealing with the 65,000 applicants from groups H41, H61 and J51/52 had yet to be found. The Secretary-General informed the Council that his Special Representative was consulting with the two parties in the search for possible solutions to that outstanding issue by the end of June 1998. However, both sides had maintained their respective positions with regard to the three groups. He urged both sides to cooperate in the search for appropriate solutions with a view to enabling the successful and timely completion of the identification process.

14. The Secretary-General further informed the Council that in the meantime, progress had been made towards the deployment of the engineering unit and the start of its demining activities. UNHCR had also advanced its

preparatory work for the repatriation of Saharan refugees eligible to vote and their immediate families.

Secretary-General's report of 18 June 1998

15. On 18 June 1998, the Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council a further report requested in its resolution 1163 (1998), in which he informed the Council that during the month of May 1998 the rate of identification had increased substantially, with a total of 13,811 applicants identified during that month. As of 14 June 1998, a total of 127,472 persons had been identified. By that date, some 20,000 applicants from tribes other than H41, H61 and J51/52 remained to be convoked, and provided that both sides agreed to the July 1998 identification programme and continued to cooperate fully, the identification of those applicants should be completed by end of August 1998. The positions of the parties with regard to the identification of applicants from the three contested tribal groups remained a source of major concern, and both parties were urged to cooperate with the Special Representative in his search for an appropriate solution. Once the Special Representative had concluded his consultations, he would submit his assessment, along with recommendations on what measures could be taken by the United Nations to move the process forward.

16. In his report, the Secretary-General further informed the Council that the preparations for the deployment of the military engineering unit from Pakistan and a demining unit from Sweden had continued but had encountered some logistical difficulties involving the free and timely provision of accommodation sites for the units and clearance to enter Moroccan airspace and land at Laayoune. Clearance had finally been received to land at Laayoune, and MINURSO expected to resolve the accommodation problem with the Moroccan Government.

17. An additional problem with respect to the deployment of the military had involved the decision by the Moroccan authorities to store in depots of the Royal Armed Forces all weapons, ammunition and explosives of the MINURSO military units. The United Nations, after discussing the issue with Morocco's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, requested that pending the conclusion of the status of forces agreement, the Moroccan Government confirm, as soon as possible, that the Mission's formed military units might carry their weapons and keep custody of their ammunition at their own sites, in accordance with the established practice for all United Nations peacekeeping operations. Pending the resolution of that issue, the deployment of the military units was postponed. The Secretary-General also informed the Council that the status of forces agreements, which had already been submitted to Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, had not yet been concluded, although the Moroccan authorities had indicated that they were reviewing it.

18. With respect to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Secretary-General urged that its presence in the Territory be formalized without further delay so that it could undertake, in close cooperation with MINURSO, its work aimed at enhancing the confidence of refugees so that they could return under conditions of safety and dignity, as provided for in the settlement plan.

19. Expressing hope that in his next report he would be in a position to present a revised schedule for the start of the transitional period, the Secretary-General concluded by urging both parties to cooperate with his Special Representative so that an effective plan and a realistic schedule could be agreed for the final phase of the referendum.

Secretary-General's report of 10 July 1998

20. In his report submitted to the Security Council on 10 July 1998 (S/1998/634), the Secretary-General informed the Council that although the issue of how to proceed with the identification of members of tribal groupings H41, H61 and J51/52 was still impeding the completion of the identification process, the pace of the identification of other applicants had increased substantially during the months of June and July 1998. If that pace were sustained, MINURSO would be able to complete the identification by the end of August 1998.

21. With respect to UNHCR's work in repatriating Saharan refugees, the Secretary-General pointed out the importance of formalizing the agency's presence in the Territory, and in that respect he noted with satisfaction the Moroccan readiness to cooperate with UNHCR. Meanwhile, UNHCR was continuing with preregistration activities both in the refugee camps and in Mauritania.

22. Another development during the reporting period, the Secretary-General continued, had been Morocco's decision to limit the use of MINURSO aeroplanes to MINURSO personnel exclusively, particularly on flights between Laayoune and Tindouf. On 30 June 1998, his Special Representative had addressed a letter to the Moroccan Government stressing that visits by diplomats, staff of non-governmental organizations and journalists contributed to the conduct of the Mission's activities and to the transparency of the process. The Secretary-General pointed out in his report that such restrictions were not in line with

the practices in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and could have a negative public relations impact on the peace process.

23. The Secretary-General informed the Council that both the Pakistani and Swedish engineering units for the demining had arrived in the region, and had started preliminary work. However, they would not be fully operational until the arrival of their weapons and equipment. In that respect, consultations between MINURSO and the Moroccan authorities were expected. Regarding the draft status of forces agreements already submitted to Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania, he informed the Council that while Algeria and Mauritania had already responded, Morocco had yet to do so. He expressed hope that all status of forces agreements would be concluded without any further delay.

24. Concluding his report, the Secretary-General reminded the Council of his intention, expressed in his April 1998 report (S/1998/316), to submit recommendations for a revised timetable for the full implementation of the settlement plan if, by the end of June 1998, sufficient progress had been made in the identification process and in the search for a solution to the contentious issue of tribal groupings H41, H61 and J51/52. However, in view of the developments, he was asking his Personal Envoy to consider engaging the parties in seeking a solution to the problem of identifying those tribal groupings and also to other issues bearing upon the implementation of the settlement plan. The Personal Envoy's assessment would influence the Secretary-General's conclusions on the continued viability of MINURSO's mandate. Recommending that MINURSO's mandate be extended until 21 September 1998, the Secretary-General informed the Council that he intended to submit his next report by 15 September 1998.

Security Council resolution 1185 (1998)

25. In its resolution 1185 (1998) of 20 July 1998, the Security Council extended MINURSO's mandate until 21 September 1998 so that it could complete the identification process. It called for a prompt conclusion of the status of forces agreements, and for the lifting of any restrictions imposed on MINURSO aircraft or on passengers whose travel MINURSO determined to be of assistance to the fulfilment of its mandate. It noted with satisfaction the expressed readiness of the Moroccan Government to cooperate with UNHCR, and called upon both parties to cooperate with the United Nations, the Personal Envoy, the Special Representative and the Identification Commission in order to complete the identification of voters phase of the settlement plan and the agreements reached for its implementation. It requested the Secretary-General to continue reporting to the Council every 30 days from the date of extension of MINURSO's mandate.

Secretary-General's report of 18 August 1998

26. In his report of 18 August 1998 (S/1998/775), the Secretary-General informed the Council that while there were excellent prospects for completing the identification process by the end of August 1998, the parties' views on the identification of tribal groupings H41, H61 and J51/52 had remained irreconcilable. Following a meeting held at Geneva between UNHCR and a Moroccan delegation on the formalization of the agency's presence in the Territory, UNHCR was awaiting confirmation from the Moroccan authorities about the undertaking of a joint mission to give effect to the above-mentioned formalization. The Independent Jurist was scheduled to visit the mission area in late August 1998 in order to follow up with both parties on matters concerning presumed political prisoners and detainees, and to consult with the Special Representative on issues pertaining to his mandate.

27. Following an agreement signed in late July 1998 between MINURSO and the Moroccan authorities, which provided guidelines for the handling of weapons, ammunition and explosives by the MINURSO engineering support and demining units, the Pakistani and Swedish engineering units had been able to receive their weapons, ammunition and equipment. However, MINURSO's communication equipment had been held up for two months at Laayoune airport, in contradiction of the privileges and immunities traditionally granted by host countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Notwithstanding the conclusion of the military agreement, that delay had been an additional impediment to the start of the actual work of demining by the Swedish engineering unit, whose tasks were envisaged to be completed by early October 1998. With regard to status of forces agreements, the Secretariat had submitted its observations on the comments received by Algeria and Mauritania, while Morocco's response was still pending.

28. The Secretary-General further informed the Council that his Personal Envoy was considering contacts with the parties in early September 1998, following which he would assess the implementability of the settlement plan in its present form. If it were not, he would examine whether there might be adjustments acceptable to the parties, that would significantly improve the chances of implementing it, and failing that he would advise the Secretary-General on possible avenues to be pursued. Such an assessment would influence the Secretary-General's conclusions on the continued viability of MINURSO's mandate and the related

recommendations that he would make to the Council in mid-September 1998, before the expiration of the mission's mandate.

Secretary-General's report of 11 September 1998

29. In his report of 11 September 1998 (S/1998/849), the Secretary-General informed the Council that the identification of all applicants from tribes other than the H41, H61 and J51/52 tribal groupings was drawing to a close, with a total of 147,350 applicants having been interviewed by the Identification Commission, including 60,112 during the first phase of the process from August 1994 to December 1995 and 87,238 since its resumption on 3 December 1997. During September 1998, the Identification Commission would continue the review of identification files with a view to finalizing the provisional voters list.

30. The MINURSO formed military units had deployed the remainder of their personnel and equipment. The engineering unit from Pakistan had continued with construction work for logistical and accommodation purposes, while the demining unit from Sweden was proceeding with the demining of those areas needed for the future deployment of United Nations civilian and military personnel. Demining of sites for the repatriation of refugees eligible to vote and their immediate families, as well as other Saharans resident outside the Territory, had also started. However, demining could not be completed until arrangements for the implementation of the repatriation programme had been finalized between MINURSO and the two parties.

31. UNHCR had continued with its preparatory work for the repatriation of Saharan refugees. A UNHCR mission had visited Laayoune from 26 August to 4 September 1998 to continue discussions with the Special Representative on a number of issues for coordination purposes. However, despite Morocco's decision to formalize the presence of UNHCR and allow it free access in the Territory, UNHCR was still awaiting the designation of technical counterparts to undertake a joint mission to the Territory. The Secretary-General expressed concern about the lack of concrete action to allow UNHCR to carry out its work in the Territory.

32. The Secretary-General further informed the Council that the Independent Jurist for Western Sahara, Mr. Emmanuel Roucounas, had visited the mission area during the last week of August 1998, where he had met with the POLISARIO Coordinator with MINURSO at Tindouf and had received a new list of Saharans alleged to be detained by Morocco for political reasons. He had then met with Moroccan officials at Rabat, and had informed them of the new list, which had been subsequently transmitted to them by the Special Representative. With regard to the list of presumed political prisoners and detainees submitted to Morocco in January 1997, the Moroccan authorities informed the Independent Jurist that they had no further specific information on individual cases. However, the Independent Jurist had been assured that Morocco would cooperate in those matters in accordance with the settlement plan, and in greater detail within the framework of the transitional period.

33. While expressing satisfaction that the identification of over 147,000 applicants had been completed, the Secretary-General expressed concern that the question of the identification of applicants from the three tribal groupings remained outstanding. He welcomed the decision of the Governments of Algeria and Mauritania to sign the status of forces agreement, and expressed hope that the agreement with the Government of Morocco might be concluded promptly after the Secretariat had completed its review of Morocco's reply.

34. The Secretary-General noted that his Personal Envoy was pursuing his contacts with the parties to assess the implementability of the settlement plan in its present form or whether there might be adjustments to it, acceptable to the parties, that would improve the chances of implementing it. He added that if his Personal Envoy concluded that even with such adjustments the plan could not be carried out, he would advise on other courses of action that could be pursued. In order to allow for Mr. Baker's consultations with the two parties, envisaged for late September 1998 or early October 1998, and for an assessment of the situation thereafter, the Secretary-General recommended an extension of the MINURSO mandate until 31 October 1998.

Security Council resolution 1198 (1998)

35. In its resolution 1198 (1998) of 18 September 1998, the Security Council extended MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 1998, and welcomed the engagement of his Personal Envoy with the parties to seek a solution to those issues bearing upon the implementation of the settlement plan. The Council welcomed Morocco's agreement to formalize the UNHCR presence in the Western Sahara, and requested both parties to take concrete action to enable UNHCR to carry out the necessary preparatory work for the repatriation of refugees eligible to vote and their immediate families. It called for prompt conclusion of the status of forces agreements, and requested the Secretary-General to report to it 30 days from the date of the extension of the mandate.

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Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly has asked me to continue to provide assistance to countries members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa and to submit to it a report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/39 B of 9 December 1997. This report focuses on the Committee's activities since 20 August 1997, when the Secretary-General submitted his previous report (A/52/293) to the General Assembly, at its fifty-second session.

2. Over the reporting period I have been particularly encouraged by the firm commitment of the Central African countries, which have continued to work towards achievement of the Committee's goals in order to strengthen their cooperation in establishing a climate of peace, stability and prosperity in their subregion. In addition to these contacts, the Committee's Bureau has met with me several times in order to inform me of progress in the implementation of the Committee's programme of activities and of developments in the political situation in Central Africa.

3. In that regard, on 2 October 1997 I held a lengthy meeting with a ministerial delegation of the Committee's Bureau headed by its President, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon, and also comprising his colleagues from Burundi and Chad. At this working meeting the members of the Bureau affirmed their commitment to the Committee as the only existing mechanism for political dialogue at the level of the Central African subregion.

4. The Committee's Bureau also requested continued United Nations assistance in implementing the confidence-building measures adopted by the Committee to strengthen subregional capacities for peacekeeping, post-conflict peace-building, good governance and combating the illicit traffic in arms and drugs, and to support the ongoing process of democratization in the Central African subregion.

5. On 24 June 1998, I held a working meeting with the Minister of Defence of Gabon, who headed a Committee Bureau delegation requesting United Nations support for a Committee proposal to organize joint military exercises aimed at increasing the capacity of countries members of the Committee to participate in peacekeeping operations. At that meeting, the Bureau again requested Secretariat support in carrying out its varied programme of activities, which involved, *inter alia*, political and security-related matters, including issues related to democracy, human rights and good governance.

6. During the visit, the Minister of Gabon transmitted to me a personal message from His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Gabonese Republic. In that message, President Bongo, whose country holds the Chairmanship of the Committee, reiterated his country's commitment to supporting the activities of the Committee, which it considers to be a valuable instrument for political consultation and cooperation in the field of security, both between member States of the Committee and between the Committee and the United Nations. I am pleased that many of the Committee's projects have been carried out over the reporting period.

7. From 28 to 30 April 1998, the countries members of the Committee held an important joint Meeting of Ministers of Defence and of the Interior in Libreville, Gabon, at which they considered in detail the security situation in the Central African subregion and the means of achieving peace, disarmament and sustainable development. The Ministers stressed the importance of combating the illicit circulation of arms and drugs, two scourges which pose a serious threat to subregional peace and security. From 18 to 22 May 1998, a Subregional Conference on Democratic Institutions and Peace in Central Africa was held in Bata, Equatorial Guinea. At that conference, member States reiterated their commitment to promoting participatory systems of Government and respect for the rule of law, human rights and human dignity as a means of helping to prevent conflict in the subregion.

8. With the support of the Group of States interested in the practical disarmament measures established in implementation of paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 52/38 G of 9 December 1997, the Advisory Committee organized a training-of-trainers seminar on peace-building through practical disarmament measures for high-level Central African civilian and military officials at Yaoundé, Cameroon.

9. In a subregion still subject to violent political change, I am convinced of the need to promote confidence-building measures, strengthen ongoing democratization efforts and promote training programmes and activities aimed at peace-building through demining campaigns, demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants into civilian life.

II. Meetings held by the Committee in 1998

A. Joint Meeting of Ministers of Defence and of the Interior

10. The Ministers of Defence and of the Interior of the countries members of the Committee met jointly for the first time in Libreville, Gabon, from 28 to 30 April 1998 to discuss the security questions currently facing their respective countries and to adopt common strategies to combat the illicit traffic in arms and drugs, scourges which threaten the peace and stability of their subregion.

11. In view of the cross-border nature of the many threats to subregional peace and security, the Ministers unanimously acknowledged that only increased cooperation between their States at the highest political level could facilitate the development and implementation of effective strategies to promote a climate of increased security in Central Africa.

12. In that regard, they adopted unanimously a proposal for the creation of a political body at the level of heads of State and government entitled "Supreme Council for the Promotion of Peace and the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Armed Conflict in Central Africa", included in the appendix to annex I to document A/53/258.

13. In that connection, the Ministers also agreed to take effective measures to eliminate the uncontrolled proliferation of arms and drugs in their subregion (see document A/53/258, annex I, section E).

14. Furthermore, I welcome the Ministers' favourable reception of the recommendations on efforts to contain arms proliferation contained in paragraphs 27 and 28 of my report of 13 April 1998 entitled "The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa" (A/52/871). In this regard, I support the Ministers' commitment to strengthen and develop a genuine climate of trust within the Committee and between its countries members as a means of lessening mistrust and promoting a reduction in military spending.

15. In their discussions, the Ministers also reaffirmed their common will to prevent more effectively the outbreak of additional armed conflicts in their subregion and reiterated the need to establish as quickly as possible an early warning mechanism which would monitor the security, political, diplomatic, economic and social, and military and strategic situation, thereby contributing to improved prevention of armed conflict in Central Africa.

16. I note with satisfaction that this proposal has the support of both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United States Government, which have decided to provide the Committee with the sum of US$ 200,000 towards the establishment of the early warning mechanism. I welcome this decision and support the appeal to other donors made by countries members of the Committee for financial contributions for implementation of this project. The Government of Gabon, the host country, has in turn taken practical measures to provide the Committee with logistical facilities at the local level.

17. In the area of peacekeeping, several countries members of the Committee have established specialized peacekeeping units in their armed forces in order to participate more actively in peacekeeping operations carried out under the auspices of the United Nations and OAU. In order to train these units for future missions, the countries members of the Committee have agreed to organize joint military exercises in connection with mock peacekeeping operations, scheduled to be held in south-western Gabon in 1999.

18. I commend the Government of Gabon on having facilitated the meeting of Chiefs of Staff and the work of experts from the Central African subregion, which met on 14 and 15 May and in June 1998, respectively, in order to finalize plans for the joint military exercises in connection with peacekeeping operations.

B. Subregional Conference on Democratic Institutions and Peace in Central Africa

19. In accordance with the decision taken by the heads of State and Government of the countries members of the Committee at their summit in Brazzaville, the Congo, on 2 and 3 December 1996, the Committee held a Subregional Conference on Democratic Institutions and Peace in Central Africa in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, from 18 to 22 May 1998. I assured the Committee of United Nations support for this initiative, which has received funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

20. It is particularly encouraging to note that despite the persistence of political tension and armed conflict in their subregion, the countries members of the Committee have maintained their commitment to the continued strengthening and promotion of democracy. I am convinced that the political dialogue initiated in Central Africa as a result of this conference will help to promote the establishment of democratic governments in this turbulent subregion. The participation in the conference of Ministers and

representatives of opposition parties, senior officers, representatives of the security forces and of civil society, seated side by side, in itself constitutes a novel and encouraging development.

21. I strongly encourage all countries members of the Committee to implement the principles and measures contained in the Bata Declaration, which they adopted unanimously, in order to promote lasting democracy, peace and development in Central Africa (see document A/53/258, annex II, appendix I).

22. I particularly appreciate these countries' firm condemnation of the use of armed force as a means of winning or retaining political power.

23. I greatly welcome the recommendation that a subregional parliament should be established in order to promote dialogue between the countries members of the Committee and to develop democratic values and the democratic experiment throughout Central Africa.

24. It is encouraging to note that the countries members of the Committee have recognized the vital role of organizations of civil society and, in particular, of women's organizations, in the peace processes initiated in Central Africa. Their decision to allocate funding to these organizations in order to strengthen their activities should be supported.

25. Furthermore, I urge these countries to implement as quickly as possible the training programmes which they have decided to establish in order to make media professionals more aware of the need to follow the code of ethics of their profession and of their responsibility to promote a culture of peace and democratic principles in the Central African subregion.

C. Subregional training-of-trainers seminar on peace-building through practical disarmament measures

26. The resolution of numerous armed conflicts and the restructuring of national armies in several Central African countries has resulted in a new category of citizens: former combatants.

27. Their presence, unparalleled in society, together with the quantity of weapons and ammunition in circulation post-conflict, is currently one of the primary threats to the internal security of States and to the overall stability of the Central African subregion. It is increasingly clear that unless countries which have just emerged from conflict situations take appropriate measures, peace will remain fragile and endangered.

28. I therefore welcome the holding of the first subregional training-of-trainers seminar on peace-building through practical disarmament measures at Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 27 to 31 July 1998. It is now important for the countries members of the Committee to cooperate in the development of programmes for demobilization, disarmament and the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life.

29. I note with satisfaction that this seminar is the first project carried out by the group of States interested in practical disarmament measures. I congratulate all of the countries which, through their generous financial contributions, made possible the practical organization of this seminar. In this respect, I encourage the group of States interested in practical disarmament measures to continue their support for the training initiatives and peace-building programmes undertaken by the countries members of the Committee in order to ensure follow-up to the Yaoundé seminar.

III. Programme of activities for 1998–1999

30. During the three meetings which they held in 1998, the countries members of the Committee agreed to undertake a number of activities and to complete the implementation of several projects launched at previous meetings (see document A/52/293). During the period 1998–1999, the Committee's programmes and activities will, as a priority, focus on:

(a) Organizing joint military exercises to strengthen the capacity of the countries of the Central African subregion to participate in peacekeeping operations;

(b) Supporting peace-building activities through training programmes and demining campaigns, demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants into civilian life;

(c) Establishing and ensuring the functioning of an early warning mechanism for Central Africa, based in Libreville, Gabon;

(d) Establishing a subregional parliament as an instrument for the promotion of democratic values and the democratic experiment in Central Africa;

(e) Organizing a subregional seminar to train press professionals in the code of ethics of the communications

profession as a means of promoting the ideals and culture of peace.

IV. Administrative and financial aspects

31. The reinstatement of the two annual ministerial meetings of the Committee, funded from the regular budget, makes it possible to better implement the Committee's programme of work.

32. However, implementation of the Committee's other activities, which are not covered by the regular budget, will require additional financial support.

33. To that end, I note that a Trust Fund open to voluntary contributions from Member States and governmental and non-governmental organizations was established in the Secretariat in 1996 by the Secretary-General, at the request of the General Assembly, to facilitate financing of the programme of activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

V. Conclusions and observations

34. Over the reporting period, the countries of Central Africa, within the framework of the activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, have again shown their determination to confront together the many challenges to peace, security, disarmament and development in their respective countries and in their subregion as a whole.

35. The important recommendations and measures which they have adopted during their deliberations reflect the Central African peoples' deep desire to live in peace and develop the many aspects of their economic potential. In today's world, to assist in implementing the confidence-building measures decided upon by the countries members of the Committee is to contribute effectively to efforts aimed at restoring and building peace in Central Africa.

36. It is, therefore, essential for the countries members of the Committee to implement the confidence-building measures which they have already adopted. To that end, I strongly urge countries which have not yet done so to sign the Non-Aggression Pact adopted by the Committee, and I invite all countries members to ratify it as quickly as possible. I remain convinced that this act of transparency will help to lessen mistrust and to reduce the tensions which may give rise to conflict between States.

37. It is more important than ever to increase efforts to resolve peacefully the many disputes which continue to trouble the Central African subregion and to strengthen peace-building endeavours in countries just emerging from conflict situations.

38. Since the establishment of the Committee in 1992, the General Assembly's constant support for implementation of its activities has led to strengthened cooperation for peace and security between Central African countries. However, much remains to be done if the conditions for lasting peace, disarmament and development are to be established. I therefore emphasize the need to strengthen this support in order to increase the likelihood of promoting and building peace in Central Africa, one of the most fragile subregions of the African continent.

39. The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa provides the international community and the countries of Central Africa with an appropriate mechanism for the development and strengthening of a genuine partnership for peace, security, disarmament and development. Therefore, I again appeal to Member States, and to the international community as a whole, to contribute generously to the United Nations Trust Fund established to facilitate the effective implementation of the Committee's programme of work.